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THE INCREASE OF GOD

BY

A. H. MCNEILE, D.D.

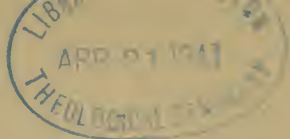
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
THE BISHOP OF LONDON

"The Head, from whom all the
body, being supplied and knit together
through the joints and bands, increaseth
with the increase of God,"—Col. ii. 19.

NEW YORK:
LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
FOURTH AVENUE AND 30TH STREET

1919



INTRODUCTION

THIS is a clear, pointed, pithy, and in my opinion a very delightful little book. The author all through it pushes home his main point that the test of life everywhere is *growth*, that even in nature such growth is due to the Energy of God, and that in human character growth is due to the same Energy, but with this difference, that in character the amount of growth attained depends upon the co-operation of the human will.

This gives us a true and very ennobling idea, expressed on p. 14: "My growth is God's life straining after *self-fulfilment*, physically in my body, spiritually in my soul."

This recalls a most inspiring picture in an earlier book of the author's, which led to my inviting him to write the present one, a picture which, I found, greatly appealed to the troops at Salonica. Man is *the expression of God*. Just as a symphony lies in the heart and mind of the composer and yet must find expression,

and the composer does not see of the travail of his soul and is satisfied until that symphony rolls out before heaven and earth, so the love in the heart of God *must* express itself in human life and human love, and did, as a matter of fact, perfectly express itself in the Beloved Son. To this I always added that the Church exists to play to heaven and earth this symphony of the love of God!

The theme in this book is really the same thought in other and equally beautiful words. *God is trying to fulfil Himself*, to express Himself in me, and the more I grow the more He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.

But if the book provides us with a noble thought, so also it does with a searching Lenten question—*am* I growing?

It is easy enough to ask, as the author says, Do I go to church regularly? Do I go to the Communion? Do I kneel down and say my prayers? But do I *grow*? This is the real test of character. All life is perpetual motion.

I think that this book will be a help to all of us to try and answer that searching question this Lent.

But besides the main question pressed upon

us by the author, light is thrown upon many subsidiary difficulties, *e.g.*, how to account for people being such "good sorts" without any profession of religion. With great force the author emphasises the childishness with which many of us still prefer the "bright penny" to the "dull sovereign," and the positive wickedness with which we foster party spirit: "I am of the *Church Times*, I of the *Guardian*, I of the *Challenge*, I of the *Record*" (p. 103).

The book concludes with a really beautiful chapter on Prayer and the offering of the Eucharist.

"Our prayers are not right prayers, if they are not the work of the Divine Spirit within us, wanting that God wants." "He often waits to do what He Himself wants, until we pray for it, and thereby apply His Energy for the purpose." "Growth in Prayer, then, is growth in the intensity with which we want what God wants." "If such is the nature of Prayer, man can do no greater work for God." "In short, to put it as simply as possible, the more holy you are, the more will your prayers accomplish" (pp. 120, 121).

These are all noble thoughts, and ought to make us, as a diocese, pray better; nay! we

may go further, they ought to make us come to the Holy Communion regularly and "armed with a great pile of prayers and praises, offer a well-prepared Eucharist, something that it is a joy to offer and a joy to God to receive" (p. 129).

I feel certain that, if we take in and live out the teaching of this book, both as individuals and corporately as a diocese we shall grow with "the increase of God."

A. F., LONDON.

'Xmas Eve, 1918.

THE INCREASE OF GOD

I. LIFE

THE English word "life" has three pieces of work to do:—1. We speak, for example, of the "life of St Paul," and we mean roughly the years during which he was on this earth as a human being, and the way in which he spent them, his actions and experiences. 2. All plants, animals, and human beings possess, or exhibit, something in common which we call "life"; and at death we say that "life is extinct." 3. The Christian religion tells us of something called "life," eternal life, which is not extinguished at the death of the body. But though we separate these three in thought—the temporal, physical, and spiritual—they are not really distinct; they are inextricably bound together in a complex of ideas which no words can define. One thing, however, we can say

about each and all of them: life involves movement, change, growth; always, universally, in every form and grade of existence or thought, to be static, still, motionless, is to be dead; when movement ceases, life is not. In the life of St Paul, action and experience were continuously new, as the onward movement of a stream of water. The most exhaustive biography can only lift the veil here and there, and give glimpses at successive stages of progress. The life can be viewed from a distance as a single whole, but within itself that whole contained—or rather fulfilled itself by means of—perpetual motion. And the same is true of the so-called “physical life” of plants, and animals, and men. The expression is inaccurate; it is not the life that is physical. The life itself is something utterly undefinable, in fact inconceivable; but it is a something which fulfils itself, physically, by the continuous motion of throwing off old particles and gaining new ones, resulting in the mystery that we call “growth.” We cannot see the movement; it is far too small for our dull eyes to see. But those who are in sympathy with nature can

feel it, especially in the spring, when its outward results are most manifest and appealing. Climb to a hillside, undisturbed by civilization, on a warm, still, moist morning in early May, and your inner spirit, if it is in tune, can *hear* the world of nature growing; in your deepest depths you know yourself to be one with it as it groaneth and travaileth together in the unceasing pain of upward pressure, of restless strain and yearning after ever more abundant life. If we could transcend time, and could view the life of nature as a single whole, we should yet realize, as we realize in reviewing the life of St Paul, that it fulfils itself by perpetual motion.

And it is a motion intense, ceaseless, universal, which is not retarded, or diverted from its appointed course, by any adverse power. The throwing off of the old, and the taking on of the new, continue without failure and without interruption in the life of every organism, and of every species in the universe. It is a life in which order is supreme, with no variableness or shadow of turning. Through every infinitesimal moment of time we, and all

other organisms in all the multitudes of worlds, are physically putting off the old man and putting on the new. And all that chemical, biological, and physiological research can do is to make increasingly clear the lines along which this perpetual motion proceeds. The mind grows dim and dizzy when we try to grasp it as a whole, and to contemplate the Mind and Will which preserve this order in its unimpeded perfection through all the cycles of the ages, "upholding—carrying on—all things by the utterance of His power" (Heb. i. 3). The glories and beauties of nature can make an immediate appeal to the emotions; but the *order* of its life, fulfilling itself by growth, needs deeper and more concentrated meditation if it is to be grasped vividly and on a large scale. But if it is so grasped it can thrill us to the core.

I hope that no reader of these pages will brush this aside in the desire to get on to the more devotional and scriptural chapters. If we believe that it is God who is moment by moment carrying forward nature's growth—and no Christian can mean less than that when

he speaks of Him in the Creed as "Maker of heaven and earth"—then all things that are written in the book of the generations of the heavens and the earth are written for our learning. To leave the study of natural science to non-Christians is to omit one volume of the writing of God. It is the only volume that interests some students; and they are learning from it more about God than they have any idea of, as St Paul maintains in Romans i. 20. But the Christian ought to be able to learn a great deal more than they. It really is a *religious* duty to learn, according to our opportunities, as much as we can about nature's growth, in order to enlarge and deepen our conceptions of the God who keeps it growing.

2. ENERGY

BUT the word "life" has a third duty to perform. It has to express the inexpressible, a something to which only Man, the highest product of nature, attains. To distinguish it from the life that we have been studying we call it spiritual life. And the object of this little book is to make clear the truth that spiritual life, no less than physical, fulfils itself by growth, by perpetual motion, by an unceasing putting off of the old and putting on of the new. The order in nature is wonderful, but its wonder is multiplied beyond measurement when we contemplate the fact that the upward progress of its life has resulted in Man, a being in whom a new and higher kind of growth exhibits itself; and he in turn groaneth and travaileth in pain in the upward pressure and striving after self-fulfilment of the life within him. And that not only in men as separate individuals, but in man as a family,

a tribe, a state, a nation, and finally in the human race, one unthinkably complex spiritual organism striving after an ever more abundant life.

It is worth a great deal to try to broaden our minds by a wide outlook, to make a practice of letting our thoughts and sympathies expand in the attempt to get a little nearer to a mental grasp of all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. Such a grasp may not be essential in the sense that without it we cannot be good Christians; but it is certainly true that without it we cannot be understanding Christians. And, it may be added, without it our intercessions for the world cannot be what they might be.

Dwell for a moment on the word "energy." It means "the power of doing work." We can think of it in two ways—before the work has begun, and while it is in process. If you compress a spring, it has "potential" energy; the power is stored up ready, and the spring will leap up the moment it is given the chance. And when that happens, the potential energy becomes "kinetic," moving, actual. Gun-

powder or petrol has stored within it the power of doing work, which is released, or rendered active, when a spark is applied. A seed is potentially a full-grown plant, because it has the power of growing into one if the conditions are favourable. An infant is potentially a man for the same reason ; he possesses the stored-up power of growth. Shut your eyes and try to think of the potential energy stored up in the whole of nature, and incessantly becoming kinetic. It is not one energy in one thing, and another energy in another. It is all one and the same energy, one stored-up power, pressing, straining, always trying to burst forth in movement, activity, growth. The entire universe is alive with one life. It cannot be measured ; it is never diminished, it can never be increased. It is the life of God at work in matter.

Now carry this thought into the spiritual life. In the physical sphere the growth of a rosebud and the growth of a baby proceed on exactly similar lines and by similar methods ; but the baby belongs not to one world but to two. Matter is inferior to spirit and dependent

upon it for its existence ; but it is the same God who worketh all in all. In the spiritual sphere life is the same divine life as in the physical, the same potential energy, the same stored-up power ; but it works upon different " material " (as in the poverty of our language we are obliged to call it), and fulfils itself not in physical movement and growth, but in spiritual ; its product is not increase of body, but increase of personality. And as each separate organism in the physical world is a point at which the working of the divine energy reveals itself physically, so each individual human soul is a point at which it reveals itself spiritually. It is impossible to press too strongly the vast truth that all life, whether it works physically or spiritually, is one. As we try to grasp the unity of material nature, so we must try to grasp the unity of spirit. We need not climb to a hillside to feel it ; we can feel it, if we will, on our knees when we have entered into our closet, and shut the door, and settled down to prayer. Get your thoughts away from yourself and your friends, and work and surroundings, and let them range over

the continents. In all the millions of the human race the potential energy of the life of God is striving, pressing, straining after self-fulfilment by spiritual growth. If you can feel and realize it as a whole, you will gain a conception of what God is that nothing else can give you. It will lead you a little nearer to an understanding of the mysterious truth that while God is infinitely complete and perfect in Himself, He is, in a real sense, incomplete in nature and in man. The energy of His life cannot be increased or diminished, but since in the universe it is potential, His very nature demands a gradual and progressive self-fulfilment.

St Paul grasped this great truth, and probably taught it explicitly in Ephesians i. 23. In our English versions the words are translated, "of Him that filleth all in all." But the Greek words more probably mean "of Him who, all in all, *is being fulfilled*." It is often said that while we need God, He has no need of us. And that is, of course, true of His Being and Nature in itself; God the Father is eternally satisfied, eternally complete, in His relationship

with the Son through the Holy Spirit. But since He has willed to be the indwelling energy of His creation, He needs the co-operation of every atom of it; and most of all He needs the co-operation of its highest product, Man. This co-ordination of the world of nature and the world of spirit, because of the one life at work in both, is expressed in a single verse in St John i. 4; (1) "In Him was life." This follows the words—"All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made," shewing that the evangelist was thinking of the life as working in nature. But (2), "And the life was the light of men"; the same life, but producing in men, and men alone, spiritual results which he compares with light. Look also at St Paul's expression, according to the best reading, in Ephesians v. 9, "the fruit of the light." He might have said, "the fruit of the life," or, as in the Authorized Version, "the fruit of the Spirit"; they all mean the same thing. Read Psalm cxlviii. with this co-ordination in mind; verses 1-10 are an expansion of "in Him was life," and verses 11-13 of "the life was the light of men." The

Benedicite is formed on the same lines ; and so also is the *Te Deum* when rightly understood. The first part, down to the words " the majesty of Thy glory," is an expression of the adoring praise of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, for the majestic life of God in creation, which produces the glorious results of growth. Then in the second part we turn to Man, represented by the Christian Church. Apostles, prophets, martyrs, the holy Church throughout all the world, acknowledge something more than nature can acknowledge, because " the light of men " has taught them the glory of the eternal Trinity and the atoning life and death of Christ.

The extent to which St Paul is steeped in the thought of God's life as energy in the spiritual world can be seen by collecting the passages in which the divine energy is mentioned. He knew, for instance, that all his own work—the incomparable work of the greatest of missionaries—was due, not to his own power or holiness, but to the potential energy of God striving after actuality within him: " The gift of the grace of God which

was given to me according to the energy of His power" (Eph. iii. 7). "I labour, striving according to His energy which energizes in me in power" (Col. i. 29). "He who energized in Peter . . . energized also in me" (Gal. ii. 2). And the same was true of the spiritual life of his readers, and of us among them: "God, who also energizes in you who believe" (1 Thess. ii. 13). "It is God who energizes in you, both to will and to energize for His pleasure" (Phil. ii. 13). "Unto Him who hath power to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which energizes in us . . ." (Eph. iii. 20). But it is not only in individuals, but in the Church as a whole, that this energy is always straining after self-fulfilment: "There are (in the Church) diversities of effects of energy; but it is the same God who energizes, all in all" (1 Cor. xii. 6). "All these energizes the one and the same Spirit" (ver. 11). Perhaps the most instructive passage is Ephesians iv. 16: "Christ, through whom the whole body, fitly framed together and compacted by every joint in its supply, according to the energy in

the measure of each single part, maketh the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Here is a vivid picture of the growth which is the aim and purpose of God's life in the Church as a single well-constructed body. In the corresponding passage in Colossians ii. 19 the apostle says (literally), "the whole Body . . . groweth the growth of God," the meaning of which would have been the same if he had said "liveth the life of God."

We shall never gain a true idea of the spiritual life till we have grasped this fundamental truth. My growth is God's life straining after self-fulfilment, physically in my body, spiritually in my soul. It will give a richer meaning to many other passages in St Paul's epistles: "Jesus Christ is in you" (2 Cor. xiii. 5). "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. iii. 17). "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. i. 27), *i.e.*, a potentiality which gives hope of fulfilment. Similarly, "His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. viii. 11). "Know ye not that ye are God's temple, and the Spirit of God dwelleth

in you?" (1 Cor. iii. 16). "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you?" (vi. 19). "The Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us" (2 Tim. i. 14). The indwelling Christ, the indwelling Spirit, does not simply live within me as in a ready-made building. The indwelling is analogous to the indwelling of the divine life in a seed or a bud; it is for the purpose of growth. St Paul's boldest expression of this truth is seen in his metaphor in Galatians iv. 19: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." Christ wants to grow to maturity in us; *i.e.*, His infinitely mature and perfect life for which, in itself, growth has no meaning, strains after self-fulfilment in my growth and in the growth of all men. The Christ fully formed in all mankind is, as Tennyson puts it, "the Christ that is to be."

3. WILL

UP to this point the analogy from nature has held good ; but now it begins to fail us. In physical nature growth proceeds in perfect accord with the will of God, with the unvarying order which is the expression of His mind. Hence physical growth may be described as "automatic." The word is actually used in St Mark iv. 28 : "The earth bringeth forth fruit automatically" (E.V., of itself). The cells which compose the bodies of plants, animals, and men cannot help obeying the "laws" of nature, as we call them, the unvarying order of the life of God. But while we think of this with awe and wonder, we are met by a mystery far more marvellous in the fact that spiritual growth is *not* automatic. Human spirits can and do disobey. And every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward in the hindering, thwarting, stunting of the soul's growth. In the whole human

race the life of God is pressing and straining after self-fulfilment, but in every member of it the human will can get in the way and hinder. It can grieve the Holy Spirit of God by preventing Him from exercising His energy. I think that this way of regarding the spiritual life shews more clearly than any other that sin is something positive. It is not mere absence of virtue, mere failure. It is the deliberate act of the will crushing down, so to speak, and keeping under the potential energy of God, instead of allowing it to fulfil itself by growth. St Stephen's words, "Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit," describe the universal tendency of the race of men ever since the first man resisted for the first time. This is a great mystery. That God's life, complete in itself, should be potential in nature and in man, and require self-fulfilment, is wonderful enough. But that man should be possessed of a power of will which can thwart that fulfilment surpasses the bounds of the human imagination. "How unsearchable are His judgments and untraceable His ways!"

And yet, at the same time, the possibility of

the case being otherwise surpasses equally the bounds of the human imagination. For God is Love, and the self-fulfilment of His life in man is reached by man's growth in love. And love that is not voluntary is not love. Man's will must be free enough to choose between right and wrong—to choose, that is, between furthering and hindering the energy of God. If he could not choose, he would be an automatic machine; and that would please God only to the extent that a turnip or a pig can please Him. In other words, divine love requires in man the capability of sinning.

But this is not a mere unmeaning paradox if we realize that God is the sufferer from man's sin. God's love is such that He longs for man's answering, voluntary love; and it is so great that He is willing to sacrifice Himself—to give His own self-fulfilment in man into the power of man to further or hinder as he chooses, in order that man's love may be voluntary. This has been stated often before; but it needs constant repetition, so long as there are those who think, for example, that the horrors of the war are incompatible with God's love. He

loves men enough to undergo, in them, all the horrors of the war, because He will not dishonour a single human being in all the nations of the earth by turning him into an automatic machine through the forcing of his will. He has given Himself a law which shall not be broken. The order of His own Being in His indwelling in man is unvarying and inviolable, because He is love. To rebel against the fact that He will not force a single German to do what is right is to rebel against His sacrifice of Himself, His own self-yielding to the will of men. To measure the contradiction of sinners against Himself, is to learn something of the measure of His love.

Why He should have made the laws of thought to be what they are, why love is of such a nature that when it ceases to be voluntary it ceases to be love, is the ultimate mystery. It is here that St Paul's words find their truest application : " O man, who art thou that repliest against God ? " The laws of thought, the laws of nature, the laws of the spiritual life, are what they are because God is what He is.

The automatic growth, then, in nature affords

no analogy to the voluntary growth in the spiritual life of men. But the comparison fails also in another respect. Every organism in nature, including the human body, grows to its prime, and then decays and dies.

*“ So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life.”*

And in the long run even types are subject to the same natural law. When Tennyson spoke of the “single life” he meant the single physical instruments of the one life. But with human souls, the single spiritual instruments of the one life, the case is very different. Their possession of will gives them a permanent distinctness, an eternal value, wholly independent of the body. They possess the capability of unending growth. No soul, except by its own deliberate act, is subject to decay and death. It is, indeed, possible for a man to “lose his own soul,” but he does not lose it in the ordinary course of nature. “It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” It has often been pointed out, and rightly, that one of the

principal features in our Lord's teaching, and in the Christian religion ever since, is the value that it sets upon the individual. In dealing with souls God is never "careless of the single life." "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." No Christian can ever say in despair, "What is my soul in the boundless creation?" Though all souls share in the one life, though one and the same divine energy works, strives for self-fulfilment, in them all, yet each is distinct, because each is given the power of furthering or hindering that fulfilment voluntarily. It is not difficult to admit the distinctness of St Paul's soul, for example. But then, you say, St Paul was unique; there has never been anyone quite like him in the world's history. And I answer, you are unique. There has never been anyone quite like you in the world's history. The endless fertility of God's creative energy is bringing into existence human beings at I don't know how many hundreds a day, and no two are exactly alike. If you were exactly like anyone else, God might be able to do without you; but because you are unique He cannot. In writing up the list of

His people He would miss you; your contribution to the fulfilment of the one life is a contribution which no one else can make. "If I were rich, if I were clever, if I were strong and healthy, if I had gifts and opportunities that other people have, if I were exactly like some one else, and not what I am, then I could do something for God." All feelings of this kind would vanish if we could only remember that God has no use for duplicates, and therefore He doesn't make them.

It is worth while to digress for a moment to remind ourselves what our work for God includes. Every soul is a deep and hidden mystery. And the influence of souls upon souls is a mystery utterly beyond our power to fathom. A wireless message travels equally in every direction, and can be received wherever there is an instrument fitted to receive it. And since the souls of men are closely bound together in the vast spiritual unity of the one life, in which there are no bodily or physical limits, no space, and no time, the influence of one soul can have its effect upon the whole. You simply don't know, you cannot measure, you cannot guess,

what your soul is doing to other souls for bad or for good. St Paul, in speaking of the Church, says, "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it"; and if so, the converse must be equally true—if one member be lifted nearer to God, all the members are lifted with it. It opens up before us vistas of unspeakable marvel and mystery. We possess for a short time physical instruments that we call bodies; but we *are* souls. And every soul is a centre from which influence radiates with no limits of space or time. Prayer for others is part of our tremendous work. But sheer love to God and men can do a work beyond our knowledge or imagination. Isn't it a thought that will make us pray with new earnestness, "Stir up, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people"? Stir them up to fresh longings, fresh strivings, fresh penitence, fresh love. It is a motive which makes life worth living for anyone.

One more fundamental truth before we pass to the thought of our own spiritual growth. If we could say no more about God than that His life is universal energy working for growth,

we should not advance beyond what is called Pantheism. It is one aspect of the Being of God, and an aspect of which modern religious thought in the West has tended rather to lose sight. Some Christians are apt to leave it to poets and other idealists, and to dismiss it as somewhat unpractical and wanting in reality. But provided we remember that it is one aspect only, and not the whole, its importance cannot be over-rated. Anyone who is trying to make use of these pages with a serious purpose should ask himself whether he has to any extent been missing a great inspiration, in living his Christian life without a full recognition of God's immanence in nature and in man.

But the other, equally important, aspect has already emerged in our study. Energy alone cannot be thought of as will. But when we know that man possesses will which can voluntarily co-operate or refuse to co-operate with God, we are led to the conclusion that that which has endowed man with will cannot itself be devoid of will. The divine will and the human will stand — inconceivably but certainly — over against each other. The

technical term transcendence, as opposed to the immanence of God, expresses the truth of the separateness, the distinctness, between God and man,—a distinctness which makes us, like Faust, feel ourselves “so small, so great.” In physical nature there is no such personal separateness; no mineral, vegetable, or animal lower than man, is a person. But by endowing man with personality, God reveals His own personality. And this supplies us with something which the other aspect of God's Being, taken by itself, cannot give, *i.e.*, an understanding of the *purpose* of God. We are to grow; but grow towards what?

4. THE GOAL

WE are to "grow up unto Him in all things." All mankind, as one whole, is to come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect (a mature, developed, fully grown) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. If we ask what this means the answer is threefold.

1. *Selflessness*. — The identification of our wills with His. "Our wills are ours to make them Thine." Every human soul is in a position to say, "Lo, I am come [into existence] to do Thy will." Not to annihilate my will; that would be annihilation of my personality. That is not Christianity, but Buddhism. When a plant or animal dies, the individuality of its life, so far as we know, is absorbed into the universal life, and its place is taken by other physical instruments by which that life can express itself. But the spirit, the personality of man, is not intended for death, nor to be "remerged

into the general soul." It is intended for growth towards the perfect harmony of his will with God's. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." And since we never reach it in this world, we conclude that in the other world the growth will continue. But if we could imagine the condition of a human soul which had reached, in respect of selfless obedience, the perfection of growth, it would not be right to suppose that it had ceased to be a human, individual soul. It is a soul in which God for ever takes infinite delight, because the harmony of the human will and the divine is for ever complete. We can form no conception of the joy in heaven over one sinner made perfect, and no conception of the bliss of the human soul in whom God is eternally well pleased. But it is an aim and a goal which gives to our daily spiritual growth all its meaning and inspiration. Epaphras could not have prayed a better prayer for his converts at Colossæ than that they might "stand perfect and fulfilled in all the will of God" (Col. iv. 12).

2. *Knowledge*.—"This is life eternal that

they should know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." This is not separate from the harmony of our will with His; it is closely bound up with it. On the one hand, St Paul prays for those same Colossians that they might "be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." A knowledge of God must precede obedience; we must know what He wants before we can want the same. But on the other hand, the more fully we know Him and harmonize with His will, the more like Him we become, and therefore the more able we are to know with spiritual understanding what He likes and dislikes. Selfless obedience grows from knowledge, but also produces it. St Paul expresses this growth in knowledge very beautifully when he prays for the Philippians (i. 9), "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." The last word in the Greek, *æsthesis*, suggests something in the spiritual life which may be compared with that wonderful sixth sense which many blind persons seem to possess. We ordinary Christians, who have

not advanced very far in our growth, have very little idea at present what it can be: a spiritual instinct, a delicate sensitiveness of perception, an intuitive certainty, "understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. v. 17).

It is easy to see how different this is from a knowledge *about* God. I might read a whole library of books about Napoleon, but I could not know him because he died years before I was born. Anyone who lived with him day and night for a few years, or even days, knew him in a way that is impossible for all the subsequent historians who have studied his life. Theology is not a knowledge of God, but only a knowledge of facts or theories about Him. Or to put it differently, it is a knowledge with the intellect alone, and not with the whole being. At the same time the intellect cannot be left out of account; and we cannot do without theology. A perfect knowledge of God must be a knowledge in which every element in our being takes part. We must obviously have *some* intellectual scaffolding for our spiritual building. But the sad thing is that some theologians and Biblical students

spend their whole life and energy on the scaffolding; they mistake it for the building, and are content!

3. *Love*.—What is love? No one knows but the lover. Others might know if he could describe it in words; but that is impossible. As well might the sufferer try to answer the question—What is pain? The physiologist can tell us only the bodily conditions of which pain is the accompaniment. Let us see if we can trace some of the spiritual conditions of which love is the accompaniment. But before we do that, we must again realize the poverty of language. In the Greek of the New Testament there are two words which we translate “to love.” The difference in meaning must not be over-pressed, but still they may be taken as expressing love from two points of view. Broadly speaking, the one involves a getting, and the other a giving. In the one the lover gets a feeling of pleasure, delight, satisfaction of some sort, from the loved; he loves because of some attractiveness which calls forth his love. In the other the lover wants the loved to get something, and so he gives

himself freely. Needless to say, the former word, though it is employed to express the Father's love for the Son (St John v. 20), is never used to express His love for us. Apart from what He gives us there is nothing attractive in us to call forth His love. His love is always a free self-giving. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," that is Himself, because the only-begotten Son is God. Nevertheless, having given Himself to us, He longs to receive back from us all that is divine and beautiful, all that we have received from Him.

Our love, on the other hand, must be of both kinds. Since He is altogether lovely, the human soul must always want to get Him. "My soul is athirst for God" is the first aspect of love. But it must not be only a desire to get. The soul, in fact, finds that impossible. The more it gets, the more it is consumed with the passion of self-giving, that is, of giving back to God what it has received. How wonderful this is can be seen from the fact that it is intended to be a reproduction of the mutual love of the eternal Father and the eternal Son in the

eternal Spirit of love. It is to be wholly and completely mutual, wholly and completely divine. Of ourselves we have nothing to give ; but since we get Him, we have everything to give. There is a real sense in which He is incomplete without it. He is "being fulfilled" according as He receives from us the divine love which He gives us. Our getting and our giving are each inconceivable alone. Our growth and God's self-fulfilment consist in our progress in the give and take of love, that finally God may be all in all. And, as was said above in regard to harmony with God's will, this is not the annihilation of our individuality. We shall for ever " 'feel God *and* ourselves,' as the lover feels his beloved, in a perfect union which depends for its joy on an invincible otherness." ¹

Now we can understand better the spiritual conditions of which love is the accompaniment. To get God is to get a knowledge of Him. To give ourselves is to bring our will into harmony with His. As we know Him better we obey Him better ; and as we obey Him

¹ E. Underhill's introduction to Ruysbröck's "The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage," p. xxxi.

better we grow in likeness to Him and therefore know Him better. It is wholly mutual, and wholly divine, and wholly love. Obedience, knowledge, and love are a trinity in unity ; and nothing less than that is the Christian life ; it is the ideal towards which we are created to grow. "Many more words I should like to say here, but those who possess this have no need of them ; and he to whom it has been shown, and who cleaves with love to love, he shall be taught the whole truth by love itself." ¹

¹ Ruysbröck, "The Book of Supreme Truth," p. 248 in the same volume.

5. THE GLORY OF MAN

LET us sum up our thoughts so far. God's life is as potential energy in nature and in man, striving towards self-fulfilment. But in His dealings with men we learn that God is personal, since He has endowed them with personality, with will, with the capacity of voluntarily co-operating or refusing to co-operate with God. And if man co-operates it is by obedience, knowledge, and love, each impossible without the other two, and all together tending to growth. But the ideal is so vast that it would be utterly unattainable were it not for the fact that it has already been attained. It has been attained in manhood in the Person of Jesus Christ. That is why St Paul speaks of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The great writer, Origen, said many true things, but he made a mistake when he declared that He who was Man on earth is now no longer Man but God. Christ is eternally God and Man; His earthly life was an

exhibition in time and space of His divine humanity. It was an exhibition of perfect human growth. And it is the eternal Manhood of the Son of God which on earth co-operated with God by obedience, knowledge, and love, that is by His Spirit the potential energy in mankind.

And thereby manhood is glorified. "The glory that Thou hast given Me, I have given them"—potentially. But it is in process of becoming actual "if we suffer with Him" (in the sacrifice of ourselves through obedience, knowledge, and love), "that we may be also glorified with Him." That will be "the liberty of the glory of the sons of God," "the eternal weight of glory," which we gradually approach by being "changed into the same image (progressively) from glory unto glory." St Paul recognized this glory in man so profoundly that in speaking of two Christians who had gone on some mission to the Corinthians, "our brethren the emissaries of the Churches," he could state quite simply, with no explanation, that "they are the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. viii. 23). It is a marvellous description of the aim set before

every Christian. We are to make actual the potential glory of the indwelling Christ. Let us turn to our own lives and see how we stand.

1. What opportunities does God give us of growth in selfless obedience? Every one knows that they are too numerous to describe. Every kind of trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity, every secret temptation, every opportunity of any sort of self-discipline, is something to be grasped at and rejoiced in as a fresh chance of bringing our will into harmony with His, of making the great words, "Thy will be done," a living reality. But most of us feel that while we are to some extent prepared to meet and accept difficulties that come, so to speak, straight from God, we find it a thousand times harder to make a real opportunity of those which come through men. To give real and ready obedience to those to whom it is due, to be clothed with humility towards others, to accept advice, rebuke, criticism, or hints from others, to put others first, to let others speak while we remain silent, to rejoice—really rejoice—in the promotion, or success, or happiness of others, to be humble, helpful, selfless towards

the men and women among whom we live, and whose faults and failings we know so well, "in honour preferring one another"—is there anything in life that is for some of us more truly crucifixion than this? It becomes possible only as we grow in the realization that in men and women the energy of God's life is at work, that they are, potentially, "the glory of Christ," that it is not they that live, but Christ liveth in them, and therefore that it is to *Him in them* that we are to be humble, helpful, and selfless. "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these My brethren—the least important, the least attractive, the least advanced in spiritual growth—ye did it unto Me." And all the passages quoted in Chapter 2 from St Paul involve the same truth. The Psalmist could ask, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" but he answered his own question by saying, "Thou madest him but little short of divine, and didst crown him with glory and honour" (Ps. viii. 4, 5). Nothing will help us towards growth in selflessness so surely as to recognize and reverence this glory and honour in every man, woman, and child. Moreover, we may, and

must, recognize and reverence it in ourselves. The great principle *noblesse oblige*, which is applicable to Christians above all other men, is finely expressed by a Jewish writer: "My son, glorify thy soul in meekness, and give it honour according to the dignity thereof" (Ecclus. x. 28). Our proud heart cries, I cannot humble myself; it would be agony! I cannot obey; it would be torture! But "who ever found the Cross a pleasant bed?" To be crucified with Christ, who pleased not Himself, to let His mind be in you which was also in Him, to manifest forth His glory, His meekness, and gentleness, and lowliness of heart, gives to one's own soul the reverence that is its due. It is not by standing on your dignity, but by self-emptying, that you exalt yourself and all other men and women whom the King delighteth to honour by his indwelling.

2. But, as we saw before, selfless obedience requires knowledge. What opportunities does God give us of getting to know Him? We can learn much from the effects of His energy in nature; but we can learn far more by studying the process of His spiritual self-

fulfilment in men. If one and the same energy is at work in all men, and in you, a vivid realization of it will give you a growing knowledge of it through a growing sympathy. We can apply to our knowledge of God dwelling in men the words of St Paul that were quoted above: "This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all delicate perception." Christ "knew what was in man," not by some superhuman magic, impossible for anyone else, but by the intensity of His sympathy, the sensitiveness of His spiritual touch. His Divinity could come out to meet that which is divine in all men; deep answered to deep with the perfect understanding of the God-Man for men made in the image of God. We cannot make the least approach to such knowledge without practice and self-sacrifice. It will come with growth in selflessness. Some people find it very difficult to put real meaning into St Peter's injunction, "Honour all men." But the way to do it is to hold fast, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, to the conviction that God's life is in them, to treat them accordingly, to try hard to discover

it, and to pray hard and work hard for them that it may grow. And this is not the duty only of clergymen and religious workers, though they sometimes need the reminder as much as anyone. How many well-to-do mistresses, who go to church regularly, are apt to forget that their servants possess the indwelling energy of God's life, the glory of Christ, as truly as they do? How many business men "honour" their clerks, and assistants, and labourers by the same recognition? How many school teachers have the spiritual *æsthesis* to see God's life striving for growth in their pupils? *Maxima reverentia debetur pueris*, "the utmost reverence is due to children," because of the limitless possibilities of His self-fulfilment in them. To recognize the divine in every one is a primary duty of the Christian life; and it will not need much self-examination to shew most of us how little we have grown towards this knowledge of what is in man.

3. But once more, it is our *love* that is to abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all delicate perception. "We needs must love the highest when we see it" in anybody.

When we have discovered the divine, however inchoate and undeveloped, in the most degraded man or woman, we cannot help loving it. And conversely, love is the only thing that will find it—love for what we know is there because we believe that God became incarnate in humanity. We sometimes speak of a man or woman as being “large-hearted” enough to love unlovable people. We should all be large-hearted enough if we were not so blind. What is needed is faith to believe that God’s life is in them, and selflessness. All obtrusion of self—all sin, in fact—obscures our vision and blots out from our sight what we want to see. It is the pure in heart that see God in the men and women around them. From the ordinary earthly, social, human point of view they may be anything but lovable. But God is lovable, and God is there. If there is one command that often seems more meaningless than “Honour all men,” it is “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”; but it is lit with a flood of light when we see that it means “Love God in thy neighbour as thou lovest Him in thyself.”

6. TWILIGHT

HAVING reached this point in our meditations on "what God is and man is" we are in a better position to look at some of the various aspects of our growth.

St Paul speaks of it as growth from childhood, or rather infancy, to manhood. He tells the Corinthians that when he preached to them he was obliged to confine himself to the simplest teaching, because they were not grown up enough for proper food; they were as "babes in Christ" who needed milk. And he blames them for not having even yet advanced beyond this (1 Cor. iii. 1-3). And in Hebrews v. 11-14 the unknown author speaks in the same way. In 1 Corinthians xiii. 11 St Paul writes as having made the advance that his readers had failed to make: "When I was a child (*lit.* a babe), I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things."

(Perhaps he was only referring, by way of illustration, to physical and mental growth, but the words can be applied also to the spiritual life.) In Galatians iv. 3 he looks back to a time when he and his readers alike were in the same immature, elementary condition: "We, when we were children, were enslaved under the elements (*i.e.*, the elementary ideas) of the world." And in Ephesians iv. 13, 14 he speaks of all Christians growing up towards "the perfect (*i.e.*, the mature, fully-grown and fully-instructed) man, towards the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we be no longer children . . . but may grow up unto Him in all things."

If these passages are studied with their context it will be seen that each of them deals with a different element in Christian growth. Let us look particularly at Galatians iv. 3. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the thoughts suggested by it. "When we were children" means "before we were Christians." The Galatian converts were mostly Gentiles, but the apostle couples them with himself, because they were in imminent

danger of lapsing into the Judaism in which he had formerly lived ; so that, for him, "when we were children" virtually meant "when we were Jews," before we had grown out of the elementary notions of God and goodness beyond which the Hebrew race as a whole had not advanced.

Now, apart from the natural tendency of the human heart to surrender in paralytic weakness to every onslaught of the world, the flesh, and the devil, I believe that the greatest hindrance to the advance of real Christianity in our land is the fact that many thousands of Christians have not the least idea how elementary, how *Jewish*, some of their notions are. Dwell for a moment on the words in St John i. 9 : "The true light which lighteth every man was [already in existence] coming into the world." Carry your mind away to some spot in the country at the darkest hour of a dark night. If you wait, there will come a time, long before sunrise, when the world is not quite as dark as it was. There are no colours, no shadows, no details, but still there are dim shapes just becoming visible ; and it is the light of the

unrisen sun that makes them so. And long ages before Christ came on Christmas day, men's hearts were not quite dark; they had some dim, faint ideas of right and wrong,—very dim and faint, but what they had came from Christ, the light that lighteth every man, because every man was made in the image of God. But as we wait longer among the hills, and trees, and hedges, the outlines become gradually sharper and clearer; shapes slowly grow into things; and more and more things emerge from the darkness, details appear, and begin to mean something definite. It is again a picture of human history. Men's ideas were growing more distinct, and they gradually felt their way to some early forms of religion. Still no colours, or shadows, or beauty, but nevertheless the dawn was nearer than before. And so the solemn progress of the early morning goes on, till we realize that it has become, comparatively speaking, quite light; the grass begins to be green, the hills blue, the sheep white, though the sunrise is still to come. This progress can be seen in the history of all nations, but especially in that of Israel. At first

primitive, wandering Arabs, they came to learn, we know not how, something of God. They were still fierce and untutored; they still thought it right to hate and torture their enemies; they still thought that religion consisted in sacrificing animals, while the condition of their own hearts was a matter which it did not occur to them to trouble about; they still thought that God cared for no one but them because they were His people, and that He hated all other nations as His enemies. The sunrise was still far away. And yet the world was growing brighter; a great step forward was made when the prophets appeared. God's revelation was given to them more fully than to anyone before. They taught that He wanted holiness and obedience and purity and kindness and truth, more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And they taught also that Israel was His chosen people—not because He loved them alone, but because He was the God of all men, and wanted Israel to be His instrument to bring them all to love and worship Him. The world was growing wonderfully bright; and it was the same light

that lighteth every man. But the brightness and the glory and the radiant colours of sky and landscape still go on increasing in their beauty. Israel learnt more about God ; and in particular they came to perceive that the sunrise was near at hand ; the expectation of a Messiah, of a perfected divine sovereignty on earth, had become an intense, passionate, immediate longing. And so at length we are brought to the little band of holy souls who looked for redemption in Jerusalem—the names that we know so well—Simeon, Anna, Zachariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, and the virgin of the house of David, whose name was Mary. They were privileged to see the first flashing ray of unutterable glory straight from the very face of the Sun. God said, let there be light ; and there was light. The light that lighteth every man all through the ages had been gradually coming nearer and nearer unto the perfect day.

This simile of the dawn helps us to see that the Christianity of the New Testament ought to be clearly perceived before we can place in its true perspective the gradual and partial

advance towards it in the Old. The Old Testament is the record of an inspired growth in the understanding of God's nature ; it is a roadway leading in the direction of Christ. But Christians must use it only in the light of that to which it points. God does not intend us to take its ideas about Him, and about goodness, and simply adopt them for ourselves "because they are in the Bible." The Old Testament is a living and moving picture of the gradual brightening of the sky before sunrise. The light was that of the same Sun of righteousness that appeared upon the earth at Christmas ; but that is no reason for contenting ourselves with twilight, as countless Christians are still doing.

In order to contrast twilight and sunrise, childhood and manhood, it will be useful to look at some of the Jewish ideas about God. It was pointed out at the end of Chapter 3 that we are compelled to think about God under two seemingly opposite and contradictory aspects. He is immanent in nature and in man, in that His life is as potential energy straining after self-fulfilment. But the fact that man is en-

dowed with will which can oppose and hinder this fulfilment constitutes a separateness between God and man ; He possesses personality ; He is from this point of view other than man. Greek Pantheism was mistaken because it represented only the former half of the truth ; Hebrew Theism was mistaken because it confined itself almost entirely to the latter half. A long period of tribal life under the government of chiefs, and then a few centuries under the rule of kings, mostly of the usual oriental, despotic type, had given to the people of Israel the idea that God was a great Chief or King. Their earthly king ruled them, he led them in battle against their enemies, and judged them ; and *in return* they had to render him obedience and give him tribute. If they failed to give him his due, he maintained his rights by inflicting punishment. And in their attitude towards God this system was reproduced. He was their Sovereign, their Leader, their Master, their Judge, who would take care of them and bless and help and prosper them *on condition* that they paid Him His dues. So long as they did that, they were correct, blameless, and safe,

to describe which they used the term that we (very inadequately) translate "righteous." If a man failed in any particular, he was "un-righteous"; his failure was a "debt," something which he ought to have rendered and had not rendered. God, of course, could never be otherwise than "righteous," *i.e.*, in the right. He and man were as Plaintiff and defendant in a law-suit, but also as Judge and criminal. When He punished He was vindicating His rights and recovering His debts. But when a man had been sufficiently punished, or had paid an equivalent in the form of a sacrifice, matters were put right once more, and he was now "righteous" until he failed again. Or God, of His free kindness, might, if He liked, simply remit the debt, *i.e.*, restore the sinner to the position of "righteousness" without due punishment.

This is what is meant by the legalism, or the forensic nature, of the Jewish religion. And anyone whose religion is of that sort is bound to ask himself five questions:—1. What must I *do* to be correct, blameless, safe, "righteous"? In other words—What is the exact amount of

my debt, my due, to God? What is the minimum that is necessary for the retention of His favour? 2. If I render Him His due, what is the reward that is due from Him to me in return? 3. If I fail, what is the punishment that is due from Him to me in return? 4. If I fail, what is the equivalent for punishment that He will accept to put matters right? 5. Under what circumstances is He likely to remit the debt altogether?

We must remember that in passing from Judaism to Christianity we pass from twilight to sunrise, from childhood to manhood; and therefore we cannot simply put our pen through these questions and say that for Christians they have no meaning. The Jewish system is not cancelled outright, but transfigured, lifted to a higher plane by the fact that God is not only a transcendent King, Master, and Judge, but *also* the immanent Life in manhood, self-fulfilled perfectly in Christ, and therefore potentially in all mankind and in every human being. A study of these five questions in the light of the New Testament would help us to realize what a volume of meaning is contained in St Paul's

words, "When we were children we were enslaved under the elementary ideas of the world." This, however, is not the place for the close reasoning which such a study would involve. But the first two questions alone, if treated in a practical way, are enough to make us think furiously about ourselves.

7. BEING GOOD

THERE is a world of difference between being child-like and being childish. Our Lord bids us be the former ; St Paul, with whose teaching we are here concerned, warns us that we must grow out of the latter. You may remember the little girl in *Punch*, who was asked whether she would rather be good or pretty ; and her answer was, “ I would rather be pretty, because I can always be good whenever I like to try.” Now why is that a genuine picture ? It is because a small child thinks that to be good means the same as not to be naughty ; to do what she is told, and to refrain from doing what she is told not to. For a small child that is quite right. And St Paul says that the Israelite nation was just like that. Their spiritual life was confined to obeying a series of commands—“ Thou shalt,” and “ Thou shalt not.” And thousands of Christians have progressed no further. Here is a pleasant, well-meaning sort

of man, who has never done anything very wicked, and who goes to church with some degree of regularity on Sundays. And he asks, "What more can be expected of me? Oh, no doubt I occasionally lose my temper; sometimes I can't help laughing at an unclean joke when I am with other men (you don't want me to set up for being a saint, do you?); and of course, if the chance comes my way, I am bound to do a stroke of business that I shouldn't perhaps explain to my daughters, for instance; but then business is business, a thing which women—and parsons—never can understand. But I don't break any of the Ten Commandments, and I don't drink, and I should like to meet the man who could say anything against my moral life." The man's soul simply hasn't grown up. To say that we have never done wrong to God, even if it were true, would not be enough.

Here is another man, a very typical Briton. He could sum up in a sentence his idea of Christianity; it means "to be good and to get to heaven." And precisely the same sentence would sum up the religious ideas of any number of Jews and Mohammedans! Their notions of

heaven may differ a little,—though I don't think they differ very much ; they all expect an eternity of luxury, happiness, and peace in a glorious place above the skies, and they all expect to be allowed in if they are good enough. The average British Christian thinks it scarcely within the bounds of possibility that he can actually be “shut out” ; it is too horrible to be possible. He has led a pretty good life on the whole, and that must count for something. God is so kind that He *simply can't* shut him out ; he assumes in a nebulous sort of way that he will pass in the crowd, and get through the door of heaven with the best of them. It is the well-worn doctrine of good works. If you ask him further what he means by good works, and if he answers in what he feels to be the proper religious language, he will say that it means keeping God's commandments. But that is Jewish, pure and simple ! If he explained himself it would probably be somewhat as follows : “ I must be truthful and moral ; I must not steal, or cheat, or swear, or drink ; I must do my duty to God by attending public worship ; above all, I must do my duty to my neighbour by being

kind—kind in word, kind in manner, kind in giving money, kind in supporting social work, and religious work, and especially war charities.” So long as a man is kind, some people seem to think that nothing else matters.

A woman might express herself rather differently. It is not difficult to draw a character sketch of the “worker” who depends upon her good works. She too is kind, at any rate to a good many people. It is true she is not always quite kind in the way she speaks about other women. But they are so impossible, so vulgar, so silly, so something or other, that she cannot help speaking the truth about them. (If it is the truth it is worse than unnecessary, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, to speak it. But some women’s idea of “being good” simply does not include attention to the warning, “Judge not that ye be not judged.”) But beside being kind, she is “very particular” about her own habits and manner of life, and also about those of her children, her servants, and anyone else under her control. A little hard and managing, perhaps; but then the world would never get on if there were not some people in

it with common sense. Moreover, she is charitable and energetic ; she is on any number of committees, and is the life and soul of all of them. She naturally likes power, and wants things done in her own ways, because they are always the best ways. Finally, she goes to church, of course, every Sunday, and sometimes also on a week day ; and she is a regular communicant. Considering all this, she cannot help feeling herself to be—and she knows that other people think her—“a thoroughly good woman.”

Now what does the New Testament suggest as to the attitude of mind of these three persons, who are specimens of a large number of Christians ? St Paul would call it *childish*. The idea of “being good” is a relic of Judaism. The apostle spends a great part of his fervid energy in fighting against the Jewish conception of works. It is quite right and suitable for children, who are in an elementary condition ; but Christians ought to be mature men who have put away childish things. The rich young man was a typical Jew, a typical child, *naïf* and attractive in his simplicity : “All these

things have I kept from my youth up"; I have always "been good." The prodigal's elder brother, on the other hand, is pictured as the reverse of attractive: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." And the Pharisee in the temple, thinking of the publican as the elder brother thought of the prodigal, and looking at life from the same point of view, had become a sanctimonious prig, which is the most revolting sort of child that it is possible to meet.

But St Paul's picture of the Jews as children contains the further thought of *slavery*, *i.e.*, forced obedience: "So long as the heir is a child he differs in no way from a slave" (Gal. iv. 1). It is the slavish attitude that is condemned in a parable of our Lord (St Luke xvii. 7-10), which, I think, is often misunderstood. "Doth he thank the slave for doing what was commanded him? So also ye, when ye have done all that was commanded you, say we are unprofitable slaves; what we were bound to do we have done!" Some people think that it sounds very hard and hopeless; but that is because they have not caught the

true emphasis of the parable. Our Lord does not mean that however much we try to do for God we can never please Him ; His point lies in the word "slave." A slave does only what he is bound to do ; as a slave he is as nearly as possible an automaton. God receives from nature all the automatic service that He needs. From man He wants something higher, something free, voluntary, spontaneous ; not a static but a growing obedience, knowledge, and love. It is "the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free." And if we have once begun to know what freedom means, we must not "be again entangled in the yoke of bondage" (Gal. v. 1).

Oh, what can be done to make people see that as long as they imagine that God merely wants them to "be good," their religion is static, Jewish, childish, slave-like? Anyone who raises his voice against it is, like Jeremiah, up against the dead weight, the ponderous *vis inertiae*, of the inherited ideas of the race. Although we have been largely freed from the notion of a mechanical, verbal inspiration of Scripture, yet we are not yet loosed from one

of its products,—the assumption that since we believe in the same God as the God of the Hebrews, all that pleased Him in their religion must necessarily please Him in ours. We find it hard to bring ourselves to realize that He was suitably treating them as children, but that He wants Christians to behave as adults. We need a prophet, we need an army of prophets, to go through the land and proclaim that “none is good but One, that is God,” and that therefore *He does not expect us to be good*. What He does expect is that we should always be growing better, which is a very different thing. Look at a small child, say at ten years of age, learning to play the piano, and the same child at the piano four or five years later. Compare him with one of the world-famed masters of the art, and it would be ridiculous to speak of him as a good pianist; but if he has been steadily improving, it is not the intrinsic merits of his present performance, but simply the fact of growth, and the future possibilities to which that points, that make him the pride and delight of his teacher. Most people would agree that St Paul was “a thoroughly good

man"; but he knew perfectly well that that did not satisfy God, and he was therefore spurred on by an endless dissatisfaction with himself. Growth was the one and only thing that mattered. "Not that I have already received, or have been already perfected, but I pursue, if haply I may grasp, that for which also I was grasped by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have grasped it. But one thing I do—forgetting the things that are behind (the successes as well as the failures), and straining forward to the things that are in front, I pursue after the goal for the prize of the heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus. As many of us, therefore, as are mature (grown out of our childhood), let us be thus minded" (Phil. iii. 12-15). It is only by our perpetual motion that God in us is being gradually self-fulfilled.

8. NATURAL GOODNESS

ONE striking fact about "being good" is that to some people it comes quite easily and naturally, with little effort or struggle; it would be distasteful to them to be anything else. Look at the effect produced by our deeply engrained notion that that is all that matters. Some one speaking of a friend says, "He doesn't pretend to be religious, but he is an awfully good sort." I think that many of us might be willing to describe some of our friends in the same way. If we expanded a little we might say "he seldom goes to church, he never goes to the Holy Communion, and so far as I know he doesn't say his prayers; but for all that he is straight, and clean, and the kindest-hearted man that ever stepped; and much pleasanter and nicer than some people that I know who are by way of being religious." Now, if "being good" is all that matters, the question naturally arises, If a man can be like

this without religion, what practical advantage is there in being religious? What, indeed, is religion if it doesn't mean being straight, and clean, and kind?

One obvious remark in passing. The man who "doesn't pretend to be religious" is quite certainly a better man than if he did. May God preserve the reader from ever pretending to be religious! Jesus Christ never lashed anyone so scathingly as He did the hypocrites. He never described divine punishment in more awful words than when He said, "He shall appoint him his portion with the hypocrites."

But what we want to get at is this: if that friend that we are thinking of had, without any pretence, been really and truly religious, what would he have gained? The question is a pressing one. We constantly meet people who are "good" without being religious; and they ask, as the rich young man asked, What lack I yet?

Picture a deep, narrow valley in the Alps. You stand high up on one side of it, with the sun behind you, and look across at the opposite slope. Close to the bottom the trees,

and grass, and boulders are practically hidden in a dark, misty shadow. But above that the greater part of the slope is distinctly visible ; you can see the large mass of it clearly with all its Alpine colours. And yet it is in the shade ; it gets light, but no sunshine. But as your eye travels upwards it comes to a narrow strip along the top, in which the trees, and grass, and masses of rock are bathed in the sun's rays. And beyond them rise the majestic solitudes of the snowy summits, glistening white as no painter on earth can white them. This picture can illustrate four classes of men. At the bottom of the moral scale we place those whom we call bad men. We cannot draw a sharp line where men begin to be bad ; the bottom slopes descend gradually into the darkness. But when men are thoroughly bad, we generally know it. For our present purpose we can leave them out of account. And we must leave out of account also the snowy peaks, the radiant saints who have grown, and are daily growing, far ahead of us, whom we are lucky to meet here and there in a lifetime. But the other two classes are of extreme interest

to us. First, there is the great mass of the mountain slope that is not in darkness, and yet is not in sunshine. Our friend, who without being religious is straight, and clean, and kind, is one of a very large class. But what makes him straight, and clean, and kind? What is the source of his virtues? And the answer is God. We can say it without the least hesitation. Since God is goodness itself, any sort or kind of goodness in anyone is derived from Him. All the various trees on the mountain slope, the birches and larches, oaks and pines, all the grassy pastures and the great bare rocks, are visible across the valley in their several tones and tints; and all these worketh that one and the self-same sunlight, distributing to each its different colour and beauty. God made man in His own image. God planted in man the potentiality of the divine nature. All that is best in your friend comes from Him. And all that is good in you recognizes and admires all that is good in your friend; he would not seem to you an awfully good sort unless there were something in you which enabled you to appreciate him. It is, in fact,

God in both of you. And the same has been true in every nation under heaven through all the countless ages of human history, before as well as after Christ was born into the world. Every good thought, or word, or deed of any human being that has ever existed has come from God. "The life was the light of men." The divine life in every man is the divine light that gives to every man any beauty that he possesses. It is God that makes men straight, and clean, and kind. It is God that has given them the heroism of self-sacrifice in the trenches, and on the ships, and in the air, and the heroism of patient endurance in the hospitals and the prison camps. It is God that makes their mothers, and sisters, and daughters, and lovers all that they have been since the war began. It is all so good that it can come only from the source of all goodness.

And yet all this is possible, and is found in numberless cases, without religion. So that the question with which we started at the opening of this chapter seems, at first sight, harder to answer than ever. If men and women, without being religious, can possess to this

wonderful extent a natural goodness which we maintain comes from God alone, what is the advantage of being religious? Look again at the mountain side. It is true that the greater part of the slope, though it is in the shade, is yet visible with its colours and beauties by the light that comes from the sun. But there is the strip at the top of the slope that is bathed in sunshine. And will anyone dream of insisting that that makes no difference? It has all the colour and beauty of the rest of the slope, but it has an added beauty because it lies in the direct rays of the sun. It can *see the sun*. It can discover with open vision the source of its own beauty. It can look away from itself, and respond to and rejoice in the heavenly light and heat. When a man says—What more can be wanted than to live a strong, practical life, doing our best? he is really begging the question. The whole point is—What is our best? Does it mean simply developing as well as we can, by our force of will and character, the natural goodness with which we are endowed, and which our training, and circumstances, and environment perhaps help us without much

difficulty to preserve? Or does our best also require religion? And the Christian has learnt that it does. Goodness in the sense of virtue, morality, the goodness which consists in being straight, and clean, and kind, is not enough by itself to satisfy the heart of God. Religion is not being good; it is seeing God; knowing, realizing, feeling, rejoicing in God with a continuously growing fulness. If God is personal, He wants the response of persons; if He is Love, He longs to receive love; and He is not getting it from the man who is not religious, however naturally good-hearted he may be. He can get from him, indeed, a pleasure like that which He feels in any beautiful natural object—"and God saw that it was good"; but from man he wants more than that.

Can it be necessary to add that religion is *not* saying prayers, or going to church, or reading the Bible, or attending meetings, or being confirmed, or receiving the Holy Communion? Vast numbers of people think it is; and when they see some men and women doing these things, and yet being obviously little better for them, it is natural that they should turn their

backs on the whole thing, and say, None of your religion for me! To think of these actions as religion, as things in themselves which count for something in the sight of God, is to make the old Jewish, childish mistake which Christians ought to have left far behind in their growth. But on the other hand, anyone who wants to do the real thing, to make God a reality in his life, to make a personal response of love to the Father who loves him, finds, as all the greatest saints have found, that in practice religious acts are indispensable, as methods—necessary, practical methods—by which man can get into touch, and keep in touch with God.

The thought on which we have dwelt in this chapter is beautifully summed up in Psalm xxxvi. 9 : “With Thee is the fountain of life,” *i.e.*, the source of all that is beautiful and good in men, “and in Thy light shall we see light”—not only *get* light, not only possess a natural goodness which comes from the Sun of Righteousness, but we shall *see* Him, we shall eagerly open our souls to be warmed in the rays of His love, and we shall give Him pleasure by our glad response.

9. CONSCIENCE

BUT still it may be urged that we have not quite dealt with the whole difficulty. How is it that there are some people who, without any profession of religion, not only are straight, and clean, and kind, but exhibit characters stronger and more attractive than those of some religious people? Well, we must begin by admitting at once that the failings and sins of Christians do more harm to God's cause than all the hostility of bad men and the arguments of unbelievers. A moment's consideration, of course, ought to shew anyone that a bad Christian is bad not because of his Christianity, but because of his lack of it. But the fact remains that what does the real harm is that he professes religion, and then in his daily life makes it appear as though religion doesn't work. And that makes the observer blind to what true Christianity is. And besides admitting that, we can admit also that some who profess no

religion do exhibit characters stronger and more attractive than some religious people. But the man who argues from that that religion is useless is not being quite fair ; he is comparing the best men of one kind and the inferior men of the other. Some amateurs play the violin better than some professionals ; but no sane person argues that if you want to play the violin as well as you can, it is better to be an amateur than a professional. It is quite obvious that if we strike an average, professionals play better than amateurs. And it is quite obvious also that the greatest professionals are beyond all comparison with the best amateurs. I think that the same two things may be said in the matter before us :—(1) Those who make a genuine profession of religion—hypocrites, of course, we leave out of account—are, on an average, better men than those who make none. And (2) the greatest Christian saints, the greatest professionals, if we may so call them, reach heights of spirituality, and holiness, and beauty, and self-discipline, and humility undreamt of by the most moral pagan that ever lived. I think, therefore, that it may fairly be said that

non-religious men who live more beautiful lives than genuine Christians are exceptional and not normal.

But there is more than that. Have you ever tried to think out clearly what is meant by "conscience"? Some people have the haziest notions about it. They will tell you that it is something within us, the voice of God within the soul, a "still small voice" they often call it, which lets us know whether a thing is morally right or wrong. It is spoken of as an infallible guide to conduct; conscience whispers this, and conscience whispers that. But difficulties begin when we find that conscience leads one man to do something which another feels to be utterly wrong. For instance, it led some men to refuse military service, while it led millions of others to accept it as a noble duty. What is this infallible something which can guide two men in diametrically opposite directions? Remember, of course, that conscience is not a monopoly of the religious man; the non-religious man has it as certainly as the genuine Christian.

We can put it in a single word, and say that

conscience is *knowledge*.¹ "Science" is one kind of knowledge, "con-science" is another kind. It is a knowledge or recognition of a standard by which we judge actions. All men have a standard, some higher and some lower. And the great question is what that standard is to be. It is a mere figure of speech to say that anyone is without a conscience. Every one has a standard which he knows and recognizes, and therefore every one has a conscience; and the man who tries to live up to his standard we call conscientious. If his standard of conduct is to make himself at all costs as comfortable as possible, or to impose his *kultur* by force on every one he meets, and if he does his best to adhere to that standard, he is in the strict sense of the word "conscientious." The reason why we don't generally use the word in such cases is that our British standard on the whole is higher than that. The standard of vast numbers of men is the standard which happens to be recognized and admitted in the particular society or group of people to which they belong

¹ I owe the working out of this thought to Mr Lacey's useful little book, "Conscience of Sin."

—school, college, profession, trade, regiment. An average conscience is for most men a binding limit of quite extraordinary strength. Now we thankfully recognize that the average Briton sets before himself a fairly decent standard. This is owing partly to his possession of “natural goodness,” which, as we have seen, comes from God, and still more to the general leavening influence of Christianity, which affects him through heredity, and training, and surroundings, and atmosphere. And helped by these things the man who, without being religious, is “an awfully good sort,” succeeds with no great difficulty in living up to the average British standard, which is to be straight, and clean, and kind, and of course patriotic and brave.

But the average is not the top ; it is kept up, and raised higher, by every one who rises above it. The average standard in the hearts of men, or in other words the *average conscience*, is raised by every one who places before himself, and knows and recognizes, a higher standard. But that brings us again to the religious man. If he is genuine, and not a hypocrite, God has begun to be to some extent real to him as One

who is to be obeyed, known, and loved. It may be only to a very small extent; but what there is, is real. And it at once gives him a standard higher than that of the man who has no religion, even though the latter be a much nicer and pleasanter person to deal with, being more richly endowed through fortunate circumstances with the instincts of natural goodness. Since God alone is "good," the religious man can never live up to his standard; he is never satisfied, never contented. And, moreover, the more he obeys, and knows, and loves God, the more he learns that there is to obey, and know, and love; so that he is always striving to get nearer to a continually rising standard. And that is only another way of describing the spiritual growth, the perpetual motion, of which we have thought in previous chapters.

Thus the religious man is up against a very big thing—the average British standard, the average British conscience—which it is his life's duty to try and raise a little higher. From the nature of the case his immediate efforts are mostly confined to the society or group of people to which he belongs. And there comes

the rub. He has to rise above the average standard of those who know him best. And men shrink from that, as they would never shrink from German shells. "To take," as a soldier has said, "as much pride in being Christian as you do in being British. And to get rid of the old idea that a man's Christianity is judged by his silence about it." To preach without preaching; to let your light shine before men without pride or priggishness; to live at a higher level, without any look or manner which suggests "see how good I am." It is hard. It is utterly and hopelessly impossible without the power of God. But that power is just what the genuine Christian gets, because he keeps himself in touch with it. Every man who is "strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man," however frequent his failings, if he is always trying, always pursuing, is co-operating with the crucified Christ, who was lifted up from the earth that He might draw all men to an ever higher standard, that is to Himself.

10. SACRED AND SECULAR

THERE was another elementary idea in Judaism closely allied with their notions about "being good." Think of the words that St Peter heard in his vision at Joppa: "What God hath cleansed that call not thou common." It is difficult for us to realize what an upheaval St Peter's ideas underwent at that moment. Ingrained in the thoughts of every Jew, and traceable to the most primitive past of Israel's tribal history, was the conviction that the contents of the whole world could be divided by a hard and fast line into two groups—ceremonially pure and ceremonially impure, capable of being used and incapable of being used in divine worship, clean and unclean, religious and secular, sacred and profane. The whole nation as a body was sacred, for they belonged to the true God and worshipped Him; all other nations were profane, for they worshipped other gods. And because every

Israelite was consecrated to God, certain kinds of foods were permitted to him, and were called "clean"; others were for various reasons forbidden, and they were "common" and "unclean," as St Peter calls them. But there were grades even in the all-embracing sacredness of the Jew. The priests were "holy," the laity were, in comparison, secular. Every utensil employed in the temple services was sacred, all other utensils in the world were common, profane. The Sabbath was sacred, the other days in the week were not. And so on. I doubt if any one idea has ever struck its roots more deeply into the life of a nation than this age-long Semitic feeling that all the world was either holy or the reverse.

The first Jew who dared to lift up his voice against it was Jesus. Can we wonder that that was the real cause underlying all the hostility against Him? He violated the sacred Sabbath by performing acts of healing, because He knew that the Sabbath was not so sacred as loving-kindness, and that loving-kindness could make sacred any day in the week. The pollution of eating and drinking with publicans and

sinner was for Him no pollution when it exhibited the compassion of the Physician who came to heal sick souls, and not the souls that thought themselves healthy. The pollution of sitting down to dinner with unwashed hands, and that of eating food forbidden by Jewish law, were for Him no pollution, because He knew that it is not that which goeth into a man that defiles him, but the evil thoughts and words that come out of him ; that the ceremonial cleanness of the body is as nothing compared with the spiritual cleanness of the soul. There was hardly one conflict between Him and the Pharisees that did not arise from this thunder-bolt that He cast among them, this daring rebellion against an assumption which had been to every Jew as unquestionable as the air that he breathed. And though St Peter had been with Him for months, and had heard and seen all this, the new truth took a long time to sink into him ; but his vision at Joppa at last made it clear to him that a Jew was not sacred because he was a Jew, while all other men were common and unclean. "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons ;

but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him."

Now to us this truth seems as obvious and certain as the truth that the earth travels round the sun, and not the sun round the earth. And yet that, after all, never crossed the imaginations of men until Galileo cast his thunderbolt. Men to-day, who decline to call themselves Christians, nevertheless inherit and live by a great body of truth which has come to them through Christianity from Christ and His apostles. We don't think that the Jewish or any other nation is sacred, and all others profane. We don't think that certain kinds of food may be eaten, and all others are pollution. We don't think it wrong for a doctor to give his patient medicine, or tie a bandage for him, on one day in the week, and right on all the other days. We don't think that to sit down to a meal without ceremonial washings is a sin against God.

And yet in spite of all this we find it hard—harder than we can express—to be free of the old Jewish notion. It seems to be ingrained not only in the Semitic mind, but in the whole

of human nature, that life is, after all, sharply divided into sacred and profane. I believe that this primitive idea is one of the underlying reasons why the British nation, as a nation, is not Christian. Capital and labour, commerce, education, politics, and law are one and all tied and bound with the chain of this mistake. The nation as a whole thinks that what it does in church is sacred, and what it does elsewhere is secular; that what we say on our knees to God is holy, and what we say all the rest of the day is non-holy. Everything that we can explicitly connect with religion stands on one side of the line, and everything else—the great mass of our life—on the other. And so we talk about religious history and secular history, religious literature and secular literature, religious occupations and secular occupations, religious education and secular education. We put our life into two water-tight compartments as rigidly as any Pharisee.

But the teaching of Christ and His apostles declares that this is wholly and utterly wrong; that it is a primitive notion which must be put away with other childish things. And to break

away from it means an upheaval, a complete transformation, of most of our dominant ideas and feelings. See what it involves. When Jesus Christ, a few years before St Peter's vision, had with His master hand swept away the dividing line between sacred and secular, He did not level down, He *levelled up*. What the Jew had thought clean remained clean ; the sacred remained sacred. But the secular—the ordinary, common, every-day, non-holy, ceremonially unclean—was exalted to be secular no longer. The revolution that He made in Jewish thought was that all life is holy because God fills all life. If you want to be Christlike, all that you ever held sacred—the sacraments, prayer, public and private, the study of the Bible, family love, every thought of God, the divine beauty of purity, the divine radiancy of truth—all this will be as sacred as ever. But it will only honour these things the more to exalt the rest of your life to the same high level. Other-worldliness is not separation from this world, but an acute consciousness of the other world in this one. A saint is not a person who does a great many religious

things, but a person who does everything religiously.

Your work—your ordinary, common, matter-of-fact, humdrum, daily work—at home, in a school, an office, a house of business, a workshop, or the thousand disagreeable, or painful, or perilous duties expected from you if you are a soldier. Are you inclined to feel that all this is not religious at all? But you can *make it religious*. You are tempted to confine your religion to Church services. But instead of that, carry your religion into your work; raise your work to the level of your religion; make them both equally holy. Many people will find, the moment that they try to do this, what a wide gulf they have hitherto fixed between them. You are tempted to let your prayers become what has been called “the perfunctory adjunct of dressing and undressing.” Make them no longer an adjunct; make them the very air that you breathe throughout the day. In every kind of work that man or woman can do there is an element of drudgery. Sometimes there seems to be nothing but drudgery, nothing but mechanical routine, that

eats the heart out of life. There is only one cure for that. Do your mechanical routine *for God*, and not merely for your daily bread. Fill it with prayer; raise it to the level of your religion; let the perfection of your diligence, accuracy, punctuality, scrupulous conscientiousness, become a continuous divine service. What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Sweep away the dividing line between the sacred and the secular; try to give Him pleasure in the smallest details; and your drudgery will be, radiant with the beauty of holiness.

And the same is true of our daily intercourse with men. It is primitive and childish to think that while intercourse with God is sacred, intercourse with men is secular, ordinary, non-sacred. Since the life of God is straining after self-fulfilment in every man and woman, call not earthly friendships common; and be not guilty of making them common. There is one thing that can defile a man—the evil thoughts and words that come out of him. The daily conversations about what we call ordinary things, keep them transparently true, keep them spot-

lessly pure. If it were right to divide life into holy and non-holy, this would be superfluous ; but if you are to sweep away the dividing line between sacred and secular, you must level up your daily intercourse. There must be nothing incongruous between your talks with your friends and your talks with the one Friend who is above all others. The men who mistake vulgarity for manliness are not "grown-up" enough to realize that *manly* and *Christian* are the same, because Christ was man.

Once more, your troubles. None can measure or recount the world's anguish save Him who bears all its griefs and carries its sorrows. People meet trouble in various ways. Some are driven by it into dull and sullen revolt, in which the heart's rebellion is too deep for many words, but it strangles and chokes all that is best in them. Some of a shallower character give vent to their feelings in a peevish and irritable discontent ; which makes it difficult for others to be sorry for them and sympathize with them ; and that adds to their grievance. Others, again, profess a pious submission with their lips ; they say, "God's will be done," but

they mean, "I suppose God's will must be done whether I like it or not; but it is very hard on me that I should have all this trouble when I haven't deserved it, and I know a good many people that do deserve it and don't get it!" And so men go on, with their heart torn and restless, defiant or repining, or crushed, because they have not yet learnt the great lesson that Christ taught the Jews; they have not swept away the dividing line between religion and the rest of their lives; they have not made their troubles part of their religion. If they could only put away childish things, and grow towards Christian maturity, they would raise their pain to the level of prayer, and their sorrows to a holy service.

II. VALUES

MUCH more might be said about the relics in our Christianity of elementary Jewish ideas to which our thoughts were led by St Paul's words, "When we were children." But if we turn to his similar expression, "When I was a child" (1 Cor. xiii. 11), we pass to a new aspect of growth. He uses his own childhood and manhood as pictures of the beginning and the final aim of the Christian life. There can be no jump from childhood to manhood; it is a matter of growth. And in the next verse the thought is continued—"Now we see by means of a reflector, enigmatically, obscurely, distortedly; but then face to face." The metaphor in itself does not suggest growth; it can represent only the initial and the final stage. But the second half of the verse explains it—"Now I know partially, but then shall I know as completely and perfectly as I was all along known by God." There can be no jump in spiritual sight and

knowledge, it is a matter of growth. "Mean-time (ver. 13) of abiding value are—not spiritual ecstasies in which men are gifted with prophesying, or tongues, or immediate mystical intuitions of things divine (ver. 8), but—faith, hope, and above all, love." In the previous chapter (xii. 1-30), the apostle has dwelt on the various *charismata*, gifts which God has distributed to members of the Church for the advantage of the Church; and he proceeds (ver. 31), "You are keen, and rightly keen, to possess the greater *charismata*; and yet (xiii. 1) I show you a way (*lit.* 'road,' the word implies movement, progress) along which you can travel to bring still more abundant glory to God and advantage to the Church." Then follows his inspired chant in praise of love, after which he continues (xiv. 1) —"Pursue after love, and then you can be as keen as you like to possess the *charismata*, especially prophecy." (The word "pursue," again, implies movement, progress.) If xii. 1-xiv. 1 is thus read as a connected whole, as it ought to be read, it will be seen that its object is to contrast the value of spiritual gifts with the value of spiritual growth in love.

And this at once suggests a well-known characteristic of a child's intelligence. "When I was a child . . . I thought as a child, I calculated as a child." My notions of the respective *values* of things were widely different from the notions which I acquired when I became a man. If, before the days when we began to live on paper, you offered to a child three or four years old a very bright penny and a very dull sovereign, there was little doubt which he would probably choose. And those who are spiritually childish, whose souls are not growing, display their immaturity, as children do, quite openly and unconsciously. It is possible to see something pretty and winning in a small child's total ignorance of values; but the same ignorance in an adult is grotesque and painful; it may amount to imbecility. To get earthly success with its fame and power, to make money—or inherit it without making it—with the bodily comforts and enjoyments, and the social status which money brings, may be all very pleasant, and in no sense wrong in itself. But it is like the bright penny, which is not gold though it

glitters ; and the child snatches at it as though it were really worth having for its own sake. We may well ask ourselves how much, in this respect, we have grown up.

And this incapacity to judge of the true values of things is sometimes very noticeable in connection with "gifts." I have tried elsewhere to speak of the true meaning of "talents." Talents do not belong to a slave ; they are simply the master's property handed over to him to use for the master's purposes. But we are now concerned with a particular thought in the parable, *i.e.*, the nature of the use that ought to be made of them. The trading with them so as to gain other five—or two—talents is a picture of growth. And if the one talent, instead of being hidden in the earth, had been deposited in a bank and had produced even a minimum of interest, there would at least have been *some* growth. But it frequently happens that it is not the one talent that is misused, but the five. Let us construct a little parable to illustrate this point of view. There was a certain mother who gave five shillings to one child and one shilling to

another ; and said, "Go and do the best that you can with this money, so as to render to me a present that will give me as much pleasure as possible." So the child that had received the five shillings boasted that she was so "gifted" and "talented," and felt a little scorn for her sister who could not render to her mother a present anything like so valuable. And she went to a post office and bought sixty penny stamps. But the child who had received the one shilling was filled with the desire to give her mother as much pleasure as possible. And after long thought she laid out the shilling on materials, and worked a little gift. Such a trumpery little affair it was ! She scarcely liked to offer it when it was done ; a far better article could have been bought with sixty penny stamps. But for all that, she had a happy feeling that her mother would like it after all ; and all the time she was at work upon it she was looking forward eagerly to the moment when she could offer her present. Her shilling had grown immeasurably in value because her use of it was inspired by love, while the other child gave no pleasure at all.

It is a special and peculiar danger of those who work for God to think that He is pleased by the face-value of the visible results which they render to Him. A clergyman has a "gift" for preaching. But God is not necessarily pleased with him simply because he fills his church. That may be only, so to speak, the equivalent in stamps. A gift for preaching will naturally fill the church. His wife, again, has a wonderful "gift" for organization, and for getting people to work. And the results in bazaars, or clubs, or Red Cross depôts are very striking. But it is quite possible that she is giving little or no pleasure to God. So far as outward results go, they may simply be His gift doing its inevitable work; and if her activities are not inspired with love for Him, she can only say to Him, "Lo, there Thou hast that is Thine." Both these people, if they are proud of their gifts and of the visible results, are as children; they have not grown up enough to know the true value of things. They have not learnt to say, "Though I have the gifts of men and angels, and have not love, I am nothing." We need not, after all, have

constructed our little parable; we have one ready to hand. The rich of their wealth cast in much into the treasury, but the poor widow of her penury cast in more than they all, because she gave all that she had. All that we have is *ourselves*, our obedience, and knowledge, and love, thrown, lavished upon God with the sole desire of self-giving. Outward results may take care of themselves; man looketh on them, but God looketh on the inward results, the joy that He receives when His love is met by the response of a selfless love. As St Paul teaches us, pursue after love, strive and pray for the inward growth, and then, and then only, you will be safe in being keen to possess the best gifts that God sees fit to give you.

There is one group of gifts in particular that ought to be mentioned. I believe that large numbers of Christians do not realize that there is such a thing as a natural aptitude for piety, a gift of religious feeling, which they have neither created nor acquired for themselves. It has come to them by temperament, which is often due to heredity, not necessarily

from parents, but perhaps from remoter ancestors. And then God has given favourable circumstances which rendered easy the cultivation of the gift, such as spare time, congenial surroundings, proximity to a church which appeals to them, and so on. For such persons it is extremely easy to be pious. They have been entrusted with five talents, while others have only two or one. Broadly speaking, women appear to be temperamentally more inclined to piety than men.

And those who have been entrusted with this particular talent incur two dangers. One is the ever-recurring danger of pride. "Lord, I thank thee that I am not like a good many other people. I fast in Lent, and go to church on week days, and very frequently to the Holy Communion, and regularly to confession, etc." Another form of the same pride is that which condemns what is called a "fallen woman," an outcast, a sinner, whom "thoroughly good people" can have nothing to do with. Think of the circumstances, the surroundings, the training—or want of training—the hereditary instincts, the temperament, the ignorance, which

have contributed to produce such a woman. And ask yourself, what does God expect from me and from her? To whom much is given, from him (or her) shall much be required. One talent is not expected to produce as much as five. The only question for you is, What am I doing with my five?

The other danger of those who are richly dowered with the spiritual gift of temperamental piety is that which has been already mentioned. They are tempted to be satisfied with the outward acts of piety as things in themselves, and to imagine that God is satisfied. Fastings, daily services, communions, confessions, and all the rest of it—these, in themselves, may be only (to use again our former metaphor) the equivalent in stamps; they are only what the gift easily and inevitably produces. When the pious person has done them all, he (or she) can only say, "Lo, there Thou hast that is Thine; I have merely done what I was bound to do, what came natural to me, what I could hardly help doing, placed and constituted as I am." Spiritual gifts, like any other talents, become a deadly snare if they are used in any other

way but as talents. To say this, of course, is not to belittle the religious acts. They are, as said above, necessary, indispensable means. But the supreme question always remains to be asked: Is the hidden, spiritual life of my soul, my obedience, knowledge, and love, a *growth* which is anything like proportionate to my gifts? And an honest answer to that is capable of changing the most pious person on earth from the Pharisee into the publican.

12. SIZE

“WHEN I was a child I calculated as a child.” This inability to recognize the relative value of things often shews itself in another way. We find it absurdly difficult to refrain from attaching value to mere size. It is another instance of the childish propensity to prefer a penny to a sovereign, or let us say a big glass marble to a small diamond. There are numberless instances, of course, in which the true principle is recognized readily enough. A large army has many times in history been beaten by a small one. A miniature by a great master is worth more than many square yards of amateur daubing. The size of a smallpox bacillus is not the measure of its capacity for mischief, and so on. Yet many people fail to grasp this same principle in some very important matters. You will find thinking men and women, for example, who are disturbed by the thought of the littleness of man. They contemplate the

shortness of the time during which man has lived on the earth in comparison with the unnumbered ages that went before him. They think of the unimaginable distances discovered by astronomy, and point to the fact that our little world is only one item in a solar system which is itself only a speck in a multitude of similar systems in the whirling universe of worlds. And then they ask, "Isn't it ridiculous to suppose that the God who reveals Himself in this vast universe, and carries it along by the ceaseless force of His will, can have become Incarnate in our infinitesimal pinprick of a planet, for the sake of the infinitesimal group of organisms called men?" But the childish conception of the value of size could not find a more flagrant illustration than in the idea that mere bigness in space and time can have the slightest bearing on the importance of man. Recall again the words of Psalm viii. The Psalmist began as though he held the childish notion: "When I consider Thy heavens, the works of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest

him?" But the next moment he put it away from him, and burst out with joy, "Thou madest him but little short of divine, and didst crown him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands, and didst put all things in subjection under his feet." And when God became Incarnate, it did not mean that a very big God shut Himself up in a man's little body. We must resolutely put away every thought which attributes size to God. If He can occupy space, we must be prepared to maintain that love, or will, or knowledge can occupy space. Our thoughts are carried back to the great truths that we have already studied. The energy of the life of God was potentially self-fulfilled in the whole body of humanity, because it was perfectly self-fulfilled in one Man. And the intensity of the divine life, its knowledge, and will, and love, continues to fulfil itself in every individual human being in proportion to his growth towards the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Life has no dimensions. But we need to be "grown up" to get a real and living grasp of the fact.

Let us close this chapter with a practical

detail in which a recognition of the truth will help us. It will help us to make another attack on the childish fallacy that success in religious work can be reckoned by figures. A parish with a large roll of confirmation candidates, or of Easter communicants, a large number of organizations, a large number of meetings, committees, and clubs, a large number of hours spent on them, is almost always thought to be a successful parish. It may be, of course; but it is not the largeness that makes it so. Some clergymen even think that a large parish pleases God better than a small one. All this, by itself, is mere size. The pride of being busy is near akin to the pride of being "good." The so-called successful clergyman, of whom men think highly, with rush, and push, and go, and a network of activities, is often in real danger of leading few souls nearer to God. If the dissipation of energy is a fact in the material world, it is a daily glaring fact in the spiritual world. The over-busy worker who has little time for prayer and thought, and therefore little chance of inward growth, is like a shivering man who has a large grate piled up with paper,

wood, and coal, and no match with which to light it. Can anything be done to persuade some clergymen and their church workers to ask themselves the question, which is of greater value—much coal or a little warmth? It is not only because iniquity abounds, but sometimes because activity abounds, that the love of many waxes cold. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”; and no extra magnitude of the lump will compensate for the lack of leaven. A parish, whatever its size, is a successful parish only if it is lightened with celestial fire. And those who are to be the Holy Spirit’s instruments to set it alight must—even at the cost of diminishing the record of their organizations and work—make time to keep themselves hot. When Canon Body was once asked what sort of line he generally took in conducting Retreats for the clergy, his answer was, “I generally tell them to repent.” And his words still live. Repentance is the first need of all who are allowing work to interfere with their growth.

13. PARTIES

By his metaphor of childhood St Paul has led us in several ways to confess our lack of growth. But he employs it yet again in 1 Corinthians iii. 1-4, a passage which may lead us to further searchings of heart. When he originally preached to the Corinthians he was obliged, quite naturally and properly, to speak to them as unto babes in Christ, feeding them with milk, and not with strong food which they were not grown up enough to digest. But he sadly complains that they were not grown up enough even now; they were still undeveloped children. In particular, their failure to grow had shewn itself in the party spirit, the factious bickerings which had gone far to split the Church at Corinth into disunion, and to which he devotes the first four chapters of the first epistle. The parties took the names of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ, as their respective watchwords (i. 12). The aims and tendencies of the several groups form an

interesting subject of New Testament study. But what concerns us here is the uncomfortable fact that St Paul condemns party divisions among Christians as *childish*. "I am of the *Church Times*, and I of the *Guardian*, and I of the *Challenge*, and I of the *Record*!" Not long ago I heard one of these papers described as "sometimes very unchristian." And the speaker was one whose general outlook was more in line with that paper than with the others. Have we grown up, in this respect, much more than the Corinthians? It is not the holding of different opinions that the apostle condemns. I am quite sure that his own mental outlook on the multitude of problems and mysteries of Christianity, which were looming larger as the years went on, must have differed widely in many ways from that of Apollos and Cephas. What stirred him to the depths was the silliness, the crude childishness, of being proud of a party label, and the consequent division and weakness of the Church, which needed all the strength of a united front to make headway against the heathenism of such a place as Corinth. Can

any Christian deny that our greatest and most terribly urgent need is a united front to make headway against the profound depth of indifference to everything religious on which, in the great mass of the population, even the war has been unable to produce more than a surface ripple? There is a world of difference between diversity and division. I am certain that St Paul would not have wished us to "scrap our differences." The most cursory study of his epistles will shew what he felt about sacrificing religious convictions. The adoption of reduced Christianity, undenominationalism, the minimum which all can accept, he would have hotly repudiated. But he would have exhorted us to be imitators of him in his clear and fearless expression of what he believed to be truth *together with* his readiness to be all things to all men, if by any means he might win some; in his steely loyalty to the revelation which he had received together with a love that "is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." It was this spiritual balance and equilibrium that marked him as a mature, fully-grown man, who had put away the childish

small-mindedness which was still producing shrill cries and noisy disturbances among the little Corinthians. We are so tempted to feel that while other people ought to give up their factiousness, and drop their labels, and stop their quarrelsome shouts, our party is in the right, our party has the best, the noblest, the widest, the highest, the deepest, the simplest, in short, the truest Christianity. And the other people think the same about their party; and so it goes on.

Our unhappy divisions are open sores, and until they have been bound up and mollified with ointment the Body of Christ will never be in health. If we listen in deep silence to hearken what He will say unto us, we may hear well-known words with, perhaps, a meaning in them that had not reached us before: "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?" Have I been nineteen centuries living, striving, straining after self-fulfilment in My Body, the Church, and yet hast thou not known Me in every single member who is striving to co-operate with Me by spiritual growth? Views as to

the best methods of growing necessarily differ ; souls differ, and need different methods. But if we could see Him and love Him in every soul that is striving to grow by any methods whatsoever, it would do more for the Body of Christ, "for the building up of itself in love," for its "increase with the increase of God," than any number of compromises and premature schemes of intercommunion. Part of St Paul's description of the Body is that "there are diversities of operation (effects of energy), but the same Lord." Diversity without division is the condition of every living organism above the protoplasm. And the more it grows in articulation and complexity, the more diverse its parts and functions become. And if for "parts" we say "parties," we need not lose sight of the same principle. Parties can be a sign of healthy growth in the Body of Christ ; they can "provoke one another to love and to good works." It is when they provoke one another to dislike, and sneers, and imputation of wrong motives that division has set in. They would not do that if every member of every party were "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

14. AN EXAMPLE

IF we turn from the children to the grown man we have a fine example of selflessness. Think how much is contained in the verses which immediately follow those that we have been studying: "What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye became believers, and to each as the Lord gave. I planted, Apollos watered, but God produced the growth. So that neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth, but He that produceth the growth, (namely) God. And he that planteth and he that watereth are one, and each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour, for we are God's fellow-workers. Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Cor. iii. 5-9). Here we have the quintessence of the apostle's teaching about "gifts," which he afterwards expands in xii. 1-xiv. 1. Apollos and himself were merely ministers, servants, to

whom God gave certain gifts to fit them for certain functions. And the purpose of these functions was the growth of the members of the Church. It was natural, easy, inevitable, that a man with St Paul's gifts should have planted, and that a man with Apollos' gifts should have watered. What neither of them could do was to make souls grow. That was done by the indwelling energy of the life of God. And the same truth is then taught with a different metaphor in verses 10-12, just introduced in the last clause of verse 9. St Paul had received gifts to enable him to lay a foundation ; another, *i.e.*, Apollos, to enable him to go on with the building. But all that they could do was utterly valueless without the indwelling Spirit of God in His temple (ver. 16, 17), which made the Corinthians what are called, in 1 Peter ii. 5, "living stones, being built up into a spiritual house." It was only because, as St Paul says (ver. 9), he and Apollos were "God's fellow-workers" that the result could be growth. The workers, in themselves, were "nothing" (ver. 7) ; in God they were "one" (ver. 8).

It is a heart-searching sermon to all religious

workers. See iv. 6, 7, where he shews that that was what he intended it to be. The clergy, and others, who plant and water, lay foundations and build, are sometimes beset by the temptation to think that because they have planted, or laid a foundation, in the spiritual life of some soul, the results will not be so good if anyone else does the subsequent watering or building. If we are not grown up, as St Paul was, we find it very difficult to accept the fact that after God has used us to help Him to begin a good work in some one's heart, He may see best to use another worker to go on and finish it. We are tempted to think of souls as some doctors think of their "cases," and resent the intrusion of another practitioner. We like to have the credit for their whole growth in grace, and we like to retain for ourselves their gratitude and devotion. But this attitude is simply silly, because it disregards the primary fact that the work is God's work, and that He chooses His instruments for each little piece of it as He thinks fit. St Paul puts it quite clearly in iii. 8: "Each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour, for

we are God's fellow-workers." His own labour is the particular portion of the work that God chooses to assign to him, and to be jealous of another worker who is assigned another portion is childish. To give place to another, or to share our work with another, may very likely be humbling, but our pride and selffulness are apt to make us call it "humiliating," which is quite different.

Later in this epistle St Paul shews the same perfect readiness to acknowledge the labours of other workers. He knew that he had, as a matter of fact, laboured for the Corinthians harder than any other preachers of the Gospel, but he knew also that God had used other labourers beside himself: "I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me. Whether, therefore, it were I *or they*, so we preach and so ye believed" (xv. 10, 11). On the other hand, in Romans xv. 20, he teaches us the converse lesson of sympathy with the feelings of other workers. We are not to intrude where God has not quite clearly called us. "I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ; but my

ambition has been this—not to preach where Christ has (already) been named, that I may not build upon another (man's) foundation." Truly it is the example of one who had put away childish things!

But the finest instance of all is seen in Philippians i. 15-18. St Paul and Apollos had been friends; but there were some preachers who were anything but friendly, Judaistic Christians who thought his teaching mistaken. And when he was in prison they took the opportunity of preaching to the Philippians, his best loved converts, according to their own ideas, which he was profoundly convinced were wrong. There were, indeed, some who preached Christ to them "out of love," but his opponents did it "out of party spirit, not with a pure motive, thinking to aggravate the affliction of my imprisonment." It was terribly galling to him, and they knew it. But nevertheless his selflessness rose triumphant. "In every way, whether in pretext or in truth, Christ is preached, and in this I rejoice." A magnificent instance of an ardent worker, with very strong views of his own,

endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! The Epistle to the Philippians was one of his latest, and it reveals the extent to which his soul had *grown*. I am sure he did not find it easy. It is quite easy to preach self-crucifixion; but it is agony to be crucified. It was not done without unrelenting sternness towards himself: "lest by any means when I have preached to others I myself should prove worthless" (1 Cor. ix. 27).

Almighty God, grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed saint in selflessness and sympathy that we, like him, may not prove worthless as fellow-workers with Thee.

15. PRAYER

WE have been yielding ourselves, for the most part, to the guidance of St Paul, as he led us by a variety of paths to study the thought of growth from childhood, and to learn to put away "the elementary things of the world," childish ideas about "being good" derived from Judaism, childish under-estimation of things of real value, and over-estimation of mere size, and the party spirit which goes so far to hinder the growth of grace in the souls of workers, and therefore in the souls of those for whom they work. But is it not very disheartening to look at the manhood, the mature growth, which he has depicted for us? Is it not disheartening to a beginner struggling with his pencil at a drawing lesson to be shewn a masterpiece, and be told that that is the kind of thing that he must aim at? But if we feel inclined to despair, we must check ourselves at once by remembering that God is not going

to wait to take pleasure in us till we have reached the ideal. However elementary the condition of our spiritual life may be, it is a joy to Him to see us *grow*. We ought to remind ourselves every day of our lives that what He wants from us is perpetual motion—movement in the direction of the ideal, however far off it may be. If it is childish to be satisfied with “being good,” it is no less childish to be despondent because we are not “good.” Tell a small child that he will be able to do something “when he is grown up,” and it will seem to him almost the same as “never.” Years seem so long, and progress so slow. *E pur se muove*. Life does, after all, move forward. By using his present powers as well as he can, he does grow in strength and ability, and manhood with its maturity does arrive. He must be content to do the next things next, with the great end far off, but always in sight. May we not read that meaning, as well as the original meaning, into the Psalmist’s words, “I have set God always before me”? I have set before me always the very character and perfection of God Himself—unreachable, but a greater

incentive to growth than any other model. That was what St Paul meant when he said "Be ye imitators of God"; "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." The child must practise—steadily, interminably practise. And half our spiritual practice is to *pray*, and the other half is to *try*.

But before turning to the subject of prayer, let us first ask, What does every Christian feel that he needs most in an elementary stage in his growth? All hearts will be ready with the answer. We need to overcome, finally and for ever, some one or two temptations which hinder us most. We imagine that if we could just get rid of those one or two, so that they would never trouble us again, all would be plain sailing. There is, of course, an element of truth in this. To fail frequently in one or two points weakens our will, and lowers our spiritual vitality, so that we do not even begin seriously to attempt progress with regard to other temptations that appear less important. But every Christian who is growing finds, in fact, that if he has progressed, the next temptation that stands in his way looms larger and

more horrible than it did before. To feel increasingly the badness of "lesser" sins is a sure mark of growth. Indeed our human frailty is such that growth itself brings with it temptations of its own—the temptation to give less strenuous care and watchfulness against the old ones, with the imminent danger of relapse ; and the temptation to indulge in spiritual pride in some of its many subtle forms. Still, if we are really growing, the Holy Spirit helps us to recognize these as well as other snares which lie in our path.

We are going to set to work, then, to practise. But in doing so we must be carefully on our guard against allowing any cleavage in thought between our own life and that of others. We are individuals ; we possess a will, and a capacity for knowledge and for emotion, which are all our own. And yet the great mystery which always confronts us is that all human life is one life. Our growth is unthinkable in isolation ; it is inseparable from the growth of others. All these worketh that one and the same spirit, energizing, striving after self-fulfilment in the life of the whole.

And in this growth *Prayer* plays an immeasurable part. The word "immeasurable," like the word "immense," used with its strict force, means what it says. It is non-measurable. It cannot be measured because it is spiritual, and has to do with results which are independent of space and time. Who can *measure* the effects of love, or of knowledge, or of will? My "little" prayers can put me into spiritual touch with every soul that exists, every individual expression of the life of God. St Chrysostom described the Church as consisting of the faithful everywhere, who are, or have been, or are yet to be. All time and space vanish when we penetrate to the mystery of their oneness. If, then, growth in the prayerfulness of one soul helps towards the self-fulfilment of the life of God, it is not that of a little piece of God in one human life. We are not "parts of God," any more than when a man loves his children he has a little piece of love for each of them. In the growth of each soul the *one* life of God, expressed in all the several souls of men, moves towards its self-fulfilment. The word "vicarious," if carefully

and thoughtfully used, can play an important part in Christian doctrine. Hence, since every true prayer is a movement towards God, a movement of growth, prayer for our own spiritual advance is a real and rightful part of our work for mankind. If this is the underlying purpose of all our prayers for ourselves, they form part of the great and primary duty of *Intercession*.

But here, again, we must beware of being led astray by notions of quantity, such as the number of people that we pray for, or the number of prayers that we offer for them. If the value lay in quantity, prayer would be an utterly hopeless task. Its hopelessness at once becomes apparent if we imagine ourselves trying to pray, individually, by name, even for the people whom we know personally. And what are they among the thousands of millions who need our help? The value of intercession lies in the motive. A longing for the self-fulfilment of the one life of God energizing in men, a real, deep desire for the growth of the whole for *His* sake, is the only motive which makes prayer worth while. There is no true prayer about

any single person or thing in all the world which is not a contribution towards the great end: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." God in Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the blessed and eternal Trinity in Unity, is complete—"in heaven"—with an infinity of completeness. But "in earth" He has willed, as we have said, that His indwelling life should be incomplete. And all our prayers, no less than our own spiritual strivings, must be directed towards the one universal aim, that He may "see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied," by gradually, "all in all, being fulfilled."

This takes from prayer all danger of littleness, or self-centredness, all unworthy notions of persuading or worrying God, by persistent reiteration, into doing things for us that He otherwise might not wish to do. In the parable of the unjust judge our Lord does not compare—He *contrasts*—God with the judge. If an unjust judge could be worried into doing something by an importunate widow, how much more readily will the Judge of all the earth answer the prayers of the elect; for, just because they

are the elect, their prayers may be assumed to be petitions for things that He Himself desires more earnestly than they can—things for which the Spirit itself intercedes with unuttered groanings, dwelling within them, and “interceding for them according to (the will of) God.” Our prayers are not right prayers if they are not the work of the divine Spirit within us, wanting what God wants. But if they are, it is self-evident that He is longing to answer them. In the mystery of his self-limitation He has (to an extent which it is outside our powers to define or calculate) given His self-fulfilment in man into the power of our will, and rejoices when our will and desires coincide with His. He often waits to do what He Himself wants until we pray for it, and thereby apply His energy for the purpose. Of course, needless to say, His will is not subject to our prayers in such a way that He must always do everything that we happen to ask. Growth in prayer, then, is growth in the intensity with which we want what God wants.

If such is the nature of prayer, man can do no greater work for God. It is, in fact, God

doing His own work in, and by means of, man. It is the chiefest exhibition of the truth that "it is God who energizes in you, both to will and to energize for His pleasure." But if so—and here we touch a further aspect which is not always sufficiently recognized—it necessarily follows that God can do His work which He accomplishes through man's prayers only in proportion to man's spiritual growth. Our growth in grace and our growth in prayer are one and the same growth. In short, to put it as simply as possible, *the more holy you are the more will your prayers accomplish.* Look at St James v. 17, translated as literally as possible: "The strenuous prayer of a righteous man has great force in its energy." Not only must his prayer be strenuous, but he must be "righteous" for his prayer to gain the maximum of force. The more that Christ "is formed in you," the more He can do by means of you, that is by means of your prayer as well as your character and influence. Every true prayer, thank God, has some force in its energy, because every true prayer implies some degree, however small, of divine growth. When a prodigal comes to

himself and pours out his heart in penitence, in the first real prayer he has ever offered, his growth has begun, and the force of his prayer is such that it obtains full, lavish, royal forgiveness. The reality and strenuousness of it are the reality and strenuousness of the energy of God's life beginning to stir within him. But the fact remains that since the growth of his soul is the growth of that divine life, the more abundantly that it "increaseth with the increase of God," the more force he, obviously, gains in his work of increasing that one and the same divine life in the whole body of mankind. We cannot conceive of any higher motive for holiness than this. It transcends all lower motives—all danger of wishing to be holy that we may have the satisfaction of possessing a beautiful character for our own sake, or of gaining admiration and esteem from others. It rises out of reach of the criticism sometimes levelled against religion that all goodness and love are ultimately selfishness. It takes away the faintest thought of personal expedience or advantage now, or in the life to come. O Lord, increase in us true religion ; make us daily to increase in

Thy Holy Spirit more and more ; grant that our love may abound yet more and more ; give us more grace, change us into Thine image from glory unto glory ; in order that by the growth of our souls, and therefore by the growth of our prayers, Thou in mankind mayest move towards Thy self-fulfilment.

16. OFFERINGS

ALL our growth in holiness, our growth in prayer, and the work that we do for God by means of both, find concrete expression in the sacramental life. The relation between the spiritual and the sacramental cannot be theoretically defined. We cannot, for instance, be content with saying that the one is individual and the other is corporate; both are individual and both are corporate. The necessity for adding sacramental to other means of grace is a problem of which we can only say *solvitur ambulando*. Insoluble in theory, it is solved daily in practice; and the solution is endorsed by the highest experience of the holiest souls for nineteen centuries. God hath set one over against the other; or rather, God hath joined them together, and man may not put them asunder. If Christ is to be formed in us, we must continue to receive Him into ourselves by sacramental as well as spiritual communion.

And herein is that saying true, "To him that hath shall be given." Growth in holiness involves growth in the capacity for receiving. A young amateur playing a sonata of Beethoven does not gain from it as much as the advanced musician. The music is the same, but the capacity for reception grows. And the same is true of the Holy Communion. Christ is always the same; He offers Himself in His fulness to every guest that accepts the invitation to the feast; but "the torrent of pleasure, the richness of the house of God," means more to us in proportion as He is being formed in us as the years go by. To the beginner in the sacramental life—the earnest-minded boy or girl, for instance, who has recently been confirmed, or anyone who has ceased to be a communicant, and after many years begins again—this can be a consolation and encouragement if he does not feel that he is gaining as much from the service as he had hoped and expected. There are, of course, faults of our own, want of penitence, want of desire, want of preparation, which mar the benefits of the feast. But apart from these, the beginner must rest

upon the truth, which is the burden of the whole of this little book, that the real sign of a vigorous life is growth. He must keep on, gaining always as much as he can, and he will slowly but surely taste and see with increasing delight that the Lord is good.

*"On, on! my Lord is dearer far
To-day than yesterday."*

But above everything, we must remember that the give and take of love are strictly mutual. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The growth of our power of reception in the Holy Sacrament will be in exact accordance with the growth of our self-offering. And conversely, the more that our soul grows, the more we shall have to offer, because we are offering to God the Christ that is being formed in us.

I doubt if this thought plays the part that it should with many Christians when they are present at the Holy Communion. We are all accustomed to the glorious thought that we offer to God the "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins

of the whole world," and in particular for our own sins, or for the sins of some other definite person or persons. (It is a great help always to go to the sacred service with some special intention, thought over and prayed about beforehand.) But beside our pleadings for ourselves or for others, God wants *us*, for His own sake. See how this finds expression in the Communion office.

When we offer our "alms and oblations," it is not only the coin that we give, and the bread and wine or other offerings that we make in church at the moment. These are only the sacramental symbols of the offering of every penny we possess, everything that we eat or drink, and everything that money can buy—our dress and personal possessions, our amusements, hobbies, interests. And if we want to make our offering as good as we can, it must, like all offerings, be *prepared beforehand*. We dare not offer to the Lord our God that which has cost us nothing. It gives a most wonderful spur and safeguard to our ordinary daily life to remember that we are, at every moment, preparing our next offering.

And if we have wasted or misused some of our money, or any other earthly possession or gift, we have so far spoilt our offering. Here is a great opportunity for growth. Our offering, represented by the alms and oblations, is to grow in value.

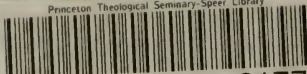
Again, we pray to God: "Receive these our prayers which we offer unto Thy divine Majesty." And later on we say: "O Lord and heavenly Father, we, Thy humble servants, entirely desire Thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." (We shall always want to say this prayer for ourselves if the alternative prayer is read at the service.) These sentences do not mean merely that we offer the prayers, and the praise and thanksgiving, which are offered at the moment. They only represent all the prayers, praises, and thanksgivings that we have poured out day by day—hour by hour, if possible—since we were last present at the Holy Communion. And if any of our prayers during that time have been dull and listless, hurried, mechanical, selfish, despondent, unbelieving, or our praises and thanksgivings

infrequent, cold, or grudging, our offering has been made of less value than it might have been. We want to come, so to speak, armed with a great pile of prayers and praises, a well prepared Eucharist, something that it is a joy to offer, and a joy to God to receive. It is like the child with the shilling, making the present for her mother. The offering, when it was finished, was the eagerly expected climax of the preparation which had kept her little hands and thoughts busy for days beforehand. Is there not here another great opportunity for growth?

And finally, the same truth is involved on the widest possible scale when we say: "Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively [living] sacrifice unto Thee." What have we been doing with ourselves, our souls and bodies, that we can ask God to accept them as a sacrifice? Have we been growing in obedience, knowledge, and love; in the discipline of our bodies, in the spending of ourselves for God and man? Life becomes a different thing, and the sacramental life becomes an overwhelming reality, if we

understand—and it needs deep and frequent meditation to burn it in upon our minds and memories—that everything that we do, and say, and think, everything that we *are*, is to make up our self-offering at the Holy Communion. It is because we offer Christ, who has died for us, that we can offer ourselves in union with Him. And God accepts us because of what Christ is, and because of what He sees we are going to be if we *grow*.

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